

July: Learn About Hepatitis

Our health topic this month is hepatitis. There are several forms of hepatitis, all caused by a virus that can affect your liver function. Hepatitis A is most commonly caused by eating food or drinking water contaminated with the virus. Usually there are no long term problems or complications. Your best defense is getting vaccinated and practicing good hygiene.

Hepatitis B could be an acute or chronic infection. Chronic hepatitis can damage your liver over time. Someone with hepatitis B could be asymptomatic or have flu-like symptoms. However, the virus can be spread to others via contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person.

There are blood tests to determine if you have been exposed to HEP C, the amount of the virus in your blood and what type you have. The CDC and the U.S. Preventative Task Force have recommendations for screening. They include anyone at risk as identified above, healthcare workers after needle sticks or exposure to HCV -positive blood, and children born to infected women. In addition both recommend offering one-time screening to adults born between 1945-1965 who have been identified as a high risk population. Ask your primary care giver if you should be tested.